John F. Goucher
Number

QUESTIONS
OF THE DAY

I. THE MORAL PREREQUISITES OF A LEAGUE OF NATIONS

By Felix Adler

In this Series there are two other addresses by the same author:
II. "The Punishment of Individuals and of Peoples";
III. "National Self-Determination and its Limits";
which will be mailed, on receipt of ten cents each, by

THE AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION
2 West 64th Street, New York City

February, 1919.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016

https://archive.org/details/moralprerequisit00adle

John F. Goucher
Number.....

THE MORAL PREREQUISITES OF A LEAGUE OF NATIONS*

By FELIX ADLER

Of the moral conditions on which depends anything like a successful formation of a League of Nations, the first I would mention is truthfulness, and more particularly the truthful presentation to our minds of the actual fitness in temper and development of the peoples that have to be considered as potential members of such a league. Among the phantoms that follow in the train of war like Dürer's Apocalyptic riders on their gaunt steeds—Famine, Plague, and Revolution—is Falsehood with her leering face. Nothing is more shocking to innocent moral sense, nothing has caused more suppressed indignation, than the systematic employment of falsehood in this war. Deliberate misstatement is the most unmistakable species of untruth. Withholding a knowledge of the facts, with a view of lulling the public into a false state of security, is another species. Suppressing certain material facts, emphasizing and distorting others, with a view of creating a false impression, is another species. In certain notorious instances these methods have been employed with evil intent by the military caste, in its desperate struggle to prolong its domination. But similar methods have also been used with good intent on the other side, for the purpose of exciting the will to carry on the war, and of concentrating antagonism to the foe. The censorship and the officially influenced press have been the chief agents entrusted with the performance of this function.

It is profoundly and almost desperately felt by many that even in normal times some of the leading organs of publicity, not alone from self interest but even in the pursuit of disinterested objects, are channels for the dissemination of actual or constructive unveracity. There seems to be a distrust of the ability of the public to digest the truth and to form its judgment on the basis of an exact presentation of all the facts. In the recent epidemic there was a general complaint that in the poorer quarters many

* An address given before the New York Society for Ethical Culture Sunday, November 17, 1918.

of the people could not be prevailed on to open their windows. When shall we be willing to open the windows of the mind threatened as it is with suffocation by the vicious germs of falsehood and to let the fresh air of truth blow through our senses?

Of course, the more outrageous forms of falsehood, like direct misstatement or the suppression or garbling of facts, are easily detected. But there is another species of fictitiousness which may be blameless and pure in purpose, but is nevertheless exceedingly perilous. It is the arbitrary projection of one's ideals upon people and conditions, the representation to oneself and others that things actually are what one desires them to be.

Now it is this kind of "idealistic" falsehood that we must be on our guard against in discussing the League of Nations. The peril is manifest in the phrase "free peoples," which is being used so commonly now. It is said that the free peoples of the earth are to form the new league and establish the new government. Now the word "free" may be used in two significations, and it is of vital importance that these two significations should be discriminated. In the one sense a free people is a people so informed with the spirit of independence as to be intolerant of a foreign yoke, a people that has the energy to shake off a yoke of that kind when it has been imposed. The word "free" in the other signification means capable of self-government: a people that knows its own mind and will, and is capable of enforcing its will in the sphere of politics.

The spirit of freedom as synonymous with independence is latent in almost every human tribe. None but the most menial, the most abject, in whom long continued servility has extinguished the spark of human self-respect, are without the desire for independence. Even when it cannot effectuate itself it glows beneath the surface. The wildest races resent alien domination. The Arabs of the desert are free in spirit like the wind that blows over their sands. Lord Cromer in his book on imperialism points out that India is restive under English dominion, that Algiers is inwardly discontented under French rule. He takes pains to dispel the legend that the Russians have conciliated the tribes of Central Asia. Everywhere, he intimates, the spirit of the subject races can be held down only forcibly—and as an imperialist he believes in coercion. To speak then of the League of Nations as

one formed by the "free" peoples of the earth in the sense of those who are unwilling to be subject to coercion, is to conjure up the very spirits of turbulence and expect them to come together in a covenant of order.

On the other hand, if a free people is a people capable of self-government, how many of the peoples at present will even measurably answer to this description? The most advanced are England, America and France. But if self-government means enacting the real will of the people, even these countries are balked in expressing their will, by the interposition of party machinery, by secret diplomacy and the like. Still they are the most advanced. Germany is only entering upon the path of political self-rule; Russia is in chaos; the Balkan peoples are in a state of turmoil. If the actual *possession* of freedom by the "free peoples" who are to constitute it is the condition of the formation of a league, then the whole project is hopeless from the start.

In my view the league should be conceived not as a body which presupposes the freedom of its members, but as an instrumentality for their education into freedom. It can fulfill a large and generous purpose through the example of those nations which are more advanced, although they too need further development. It can further fulfill its purpose by requiring in all states the necessary preconditions of self-government, such as a universal system of compulsory education; and still further and in a more deep-reaching way, by training the members of the league to a considerate appreciation of the needs and interests of their neighbor nations and by inculcating the habit of measuring the rightfulness of one's own ends and interests by the effect which their satisfaction would have upon the interests of others. The really free people is that one in which the rightfulness of the claims of one's own group is judged by the effect of their satisfaction on other groups. And this habit, if acquired by the nations participating in the league, will also react favorably upon the solution of the manacing domestic problems that exist within each people.

There is no royal road to the ideal state of things. There is no short-cut that will realize democracy in the world through the mere fact of casting off yokes. Democracy, in any genuine sense of the word, will be the fruit of gradual and difficult endeavors. Instead of founding the league on the false assumption that

those who enter into it are already the free peoples of the world, we should regard it as a means of educating the peoples that belong to it unto freedom.

In discussing the moral prerequisites of a League of Nations I wish to avoid as far as possible the consideration of technical details. But certain practical difficulties are so obvious and so portentous that I cannot altogether avoid reference to them. Especially misleading is the prerequisite that the league shall be a league of justice, that the peace consummated shall be a peace of justice. It might be better to say a *piece* rather than a *peace* of justice. An editorial in one of our metropolitan newspapers a few days ago contained the statement that at the Peace Conference the map of Europe would be redrawn in such a way that justice would be done to all the nations of the world—a statement appalling in its ignorance! For how can anyone not deluded by catchwords expect that by one curt and immediate decision justice shall be done to the great variety of peoples and peoplets that are thronging to the peace table? How, without superhuman wisdom to guide, can the accumulated wrongs of centuries, and their rankling after-effects, be wiped out? The wrong done in 1871 is only one. There is the wrong done to Poland over a century ago; the wrong done to the Lithuanians, the Ukranians many centuries ago; the wrong done to the Jews two thousand years ago. Somehow all these ancient wrongs that have slumbered long are starting up into new life. But the Syrians in this city held a meeting recently protesting against the reconstruction of a Jewish state, on the ground that the majority of the inhabitants of Palestine, being non-Jews, ought not to be subjected to the undemocratic principle of a rule of the minority, and objecting to the promoted immigration of Zionists from all parts of the world into the country inhabited at present by a majority of Arabs. How will it be possible to adjudicate on the principle of exact justice all such conflicting claims, the claims, too, of Italy and Greece in Albania, of the Croatians, the Roumanians, the Czecho-Slovaks and the others? Some kind of compromise will no doubt have to be reached. But any compromise that can be proposed will leave many of those affected by it discontented. And will it appear, can it appear, justice in their eyes?

The greatest peril of all has been already pointed out by many

who object to the league. It is that the league may be used to sanction the *status quo*, the state of things which will exist at the conclusion of the Peace Conference (or at the formation of the league) with all the elements of unfairness that will inevitably remain unexpurgated, and that thereafter those who seek relief in more equitable arrangements will find the whole deterrent force of the league used against them. They will have to come with their complaints before a tribunal in which those who profit by existing arrangements have the major influence and power. The decision will go against them, and if they rebel they will be treated as disturbers of the peace. On the other hand, if, in the case of a serious controversy, the decision should go against the most powerful members or member of the league, the weaker members will be impotent to enforce the decision.

How far from imaginary this supposition is may be illustrated by a crucial instance which has been brought forward by Mr. Brailsford in his admirable book on *A League of Nations*. Brailsford is thoroughly English in feeling, but he is also one of those rare minds that are able to divest themselves to a singular degree of national prejudices. In discussing the question of the freedom of the seas, he admits that "Britannia rules the waves," and will insist on ruling the waves; in other words, that the superiority of the British fleet to any one or possibly to any two of the largest fleets of her neighbors will be maintained. England, to secure her food supply and maintain her scattered Empire, will maintain her naval supremacy. If disarmament is proposed, the disarmament must be such as to leave the relative superiority, the proportion of naval strength, the same. At the beginning of the war the British fleet was already the mightiest on the water. Since then it has trebled its tonnage. It is the most formidable weapon that human ingenuity has forged. It was the British fleet that put the iron ring of the blockade around Germany. It was the British fleet that swept the seas of enemy craft. It is the British fleet that has starved the Central Powers into submission. Dwelling on these facts it is not hard to realize the difficulty of constructing on the basis of justice a partnership between a number of peoples quite inferior in power, especially in sea-power and in money power, and one or two peoples of gigantic power.

The British Empire extends over half the globe. If, as has

been proposed by some writers, the League of Nations virtually takes the form of the alliance of America with this power, the might of the Anglo-Saxons will be so overwhelming that other stocks and races will be able to live only on sufferance. How can they meet these giant nations on the level? How could economic pressure be successfully exerted if in any case the majority of the international court should find against Great Britain? The answer usually given is that an international fleet shall police the seas, and assure the safety of her food supply to England,—an international fleet doing police duty on all the waters of the world. But would not the quota of England in such a fleet have to be superior to the quota of other contributing nations in order to give her security and the sense of security? What then remains save the hope and belief that England will use her superior power conscientiously? Brailsford himself presents or quotes this solution somewhat diffidently but he has no other. And it is no solution because, as Lincoln said, there is no class that is good enough to be entrusted with the guardianship of other classes; and there is no nation that is so unselfish as to be safely allowed to have at its mercy the destinies of other nations. Nay, granted that a people is wholly and purely disinterested in intention, no human beings can so far escape the unconscious influence of egotism as not to see the interests of the world in the light of their own interests.

As the result of the war the Anglo-Saxon people are preponderant. Russia, the habitual enemy of England, is for the time being helpless. The Central Powers are defeated. France and Italy have been greatly weakened, and will in important respects be dependent on England and the United States. The Latin nations do not compare in population or in resources with the people that own the richest territories of the globe. If the League of Nations is to be employed in order to make this state of things definitive, the attempt will breed disaster. The hegemony of any one race and the tutelage of others is not in the interest either of the sovereign race or its wards. And in the long run the dream of Anglo-Saxon world supremacy is not feasible. Russia, with her 180,000,000 and her untapped riches, will recover. The Central Powers in time will find themselves. The East will not always remain dependent. The child nations will grow up. The

league should foster this evolution, not try to prevent or hamper it. The kind of justice it dispenses should be flexible, not hard and fast. The understandings must be such as to be subject to revision. The legitimate desire and need for expansion must be gratified, not strangled. The late comers must not find themselves excluded from the table, and bidden to feed on the leavings.

The new fellowship, if it is to answer its purpose at all, must be such as to assist the freedom of its members, and not be based on the false assumption that they who have shaken off autocracy are already free. It must recognize that it can only at present make the bare beginnings of doing justice; it must be a flexible instrument for more and more largely doing justice as time goes by. These are two main contentions that I have to advance against the current notion of the league.

And now let us ask what can positively be accomplished, the situation being what it is,—for the idea of the new fellowship of peoples is too precious, too much an object of aspiration and longing among the war-scourged millions to be lightly set aside or to be relinquished because of the obstacles, heavy as they are, that stand in the way of the full realization of what it may some day come to mean. A beginning can be made; something—and that not a little—can be done at once. And here I urge the prime importance of an international legislature as against a mere court of arbitration. A parliament of nations should be elected by the different national parliaments, with representation from the laboring class and all other important groups in each people. If there is to be democracy, then we must have a law-making body, because democracy is distinguished from other forms of government mainly by the fact that law-making is in the hands of the representatives of the people. Judges may be found in a monarchy as impartial and incorruptible as in a democracy. A bureaucracy may be found in a monarchy as honest and efficient as in a democracy. If Germany to-day is to pass out of the storms that assail her, it will be to her trained bureaucracy that the result will be due. But a legislature enacting the will of the people according to the judgment of the people is the prerogative of any people that deserves in any degree the name of freedom. An international legislative body, therefore, is essential if the government of the society of nations is to be on the democratic plan.

The functions of this body will be, in the first place, to garner up some of the moral results of this war, to issue a new set of moral commandments and prohibitions, to forbid for all future time certain enormities in the methods of warfare, such as the use of poisonous gas and attack from the air on the unprotected civilian population. Next, to extend regulation of the food supply of the world in normal times (such as has come partly into use during the last few years) in order to *prevent* the occurrence of famines, instead of calling upon the civilized nations of the world, helplessly, aimlessly, when a famine occurs in every few years, taking off millions of people in China, in India, to send help, help which then often comes too late. In the same manner, the international legislature will appoint a commission to take charge of health protection for the world. At present, a plague starts somewhere in Central Asia, and travels with fatal steps westward, enters Spain, crosses the ocean, and lays low its thousands of victims in this country. Instead of trying to quarantine, the international legislature will make it its duty systematically to seek out the places of origin of the pestilence, and quench it at its source, as Colonel Waring tracked the yellow fever to its lair in Cuba and slew it there.

The international legislature, besides promoting education throughout the world, which is the basis of freedom, will have the *planetary* outlook in all its procedures, and this itself will give it a dignity and scope such as no parliament has ever had before. Besides giving encouragement to strength wherever it shows itself, generously unbinding instead of churlishly stifling the newly arising forces in trade and industry—objects which are generally recognized by those who have written on the subject—the international legislature will have a unique opportunity and duty to foster the evolution of the retarded or backward portions of the human race. Perhaps eight hundred millions are comprised under this head. *And it is on the relations of the civilized to the less civilized that the future of mankind will depend.* The lands, the trade opportunities of the less civilized have been the bone of contention between the more civilized. The colonial rivalries of the latter have had the major share in preparing the conditions that led to this war. A change of policy and a change of heart in respect to the peoples of Africa and Asia is the one greatest moral

prerequisite for the success of the league. Yet the broadest conception commonly entertained at present is that of the Open Door, according to which instead of a crowd of merchants jostling each other, and seeking to prevent each the others from entering the house where they intend to sell their goods, the door shall be open to all. The Open Door conception is designed to be fair to all who want to enter the house; it has no adequate element of fairness towards the inmates. The broadest conception thus far reached in the treatment of the natives is that the interests of trade shall come first, and after them as much human consideration as is consistent with trade. There must be a real change of heart, a reversal of the order of ideas—such gain for the merchant of the West as is consistent with the utmost human rights along with the highest human development of the native populations.

The international legislature should take the planetary view. The world is to be one household. The more civilized nations are the adults. It is the part of the adults to foster the development of the undeveloped. And the adult peoples, like the parents in the family, will gain their own moral maturity in the very act of benefiting the helpless and less mature, and drawing them up toward higher levels.

In this way the conclave of the nations of the earth by their representatives, in a body proceeding from and overarching all the parliaments, will tend more and more to insure peace by anticipating and forestalling the causes that lead to strife. The idea of a League to Enforce Peace is altogether erroneous. Peace depends upon a certain attitude of mind, and this cannot be enforced from without. You cannot introduce the spirit of righteousness into individuals or peoples with a club. You cannot prevent the steam from generating by shutting the safety-valve. And here I have a word to say in regard to the court or Commission of Conciliation in the case of non-justiciable controversies, which is provided for in all the projects for the league that have come to my knowledge, and which I cannot but regard as radically unfit to be the organ of justice in deciding a controversy between people and people. It is proposed by some that the members of the Commission of Conciliation shall be selected *ad hoc* for each single case as it arises. But to this it is objected that the judges selected in this way, when the air is full of pas-

sion, are sure to be biased, and that an impartial tribunal cannot be constructed in this manner. Hence it is proposed by others that the members of the Commission of Conciliation should be permanent, that they should hold regular sessions, and be withdrawn from the agitations of the day, living in an atmosphere of Olympian impartiality. Neither of these propositions is sound. A people touched, or believing itself to be touched, in some vital interest, will not recognize as just the decision of a biased tribunal, and still less will it accept the verdict of men who are remote from the urgent movements of the day, and who therefore cannot be supposed to sympathize with or understand them. The very notion of constructing a quasi-infallible tribunal, consisting of a few persons, is a piece of that false idealism which I characterized at the beginning of my address. We cannot find men of such superhuman detachment, such freedom from the passion of their fellow-nationals, such exalted, Olympian, impartiality.

I look therefore to the Parliament itself as the true resource in this matter. Within the bosom of the Parliament the controversies should be heard and adjusted. The Parliament itself, and not some court or commission, should be the organ of conciliation. The representatives of the two parties in dispute shall stand up in the presence of the representatives of all the peoples of the earth. They shall face each other in a public hearing, not in a committee room, and under the pressure of the supreme desire of the great conclave in the midst of which they stand, that the peace shall not be broken and that right shall be done, they must make good the rightfulness of their respective claims.

And here a new ethical principle of conciliation, may be expected to come into action. The method of conciliation at present in use is not genuine conciliation at all. Each side, as in labor controversies, appears before arbitrators or conciliators prepared to insist on the rightfulness of its claims,—seeing only the right on its own side. The opposite party as obstinately insists on the right, or what it conceives to be the right on its side. The result at best is a temporary truce which leads presently to new outbreaks. The ethical principle of conciliation is exactly the reverse. Each side shall be required as a preliminary to confess the full measure of right acknowledged by it on the side of its opponent, and then to prove that its own claims are con-

sistent with those rights of its adversary which it has recognized. Thus, in a labor dispute, if the employer begins by manifesting his appreciation of whatever he must admit to be right in the contentions of the workers as to hours, pay, and conditions, and thus demonstrates his willingness to meet these just demands to the utmost of his ability, he will thereby dispose his opponents to relinquish their unfair and exaggerated claims, and to recognize on their side what the employer can rightly lay claim to in the management and control of his business. For fairness on the one side breeds fairness on the other. Rights are mutual: there is no right for one which has not a correlative right attributable to the other. And the same method and principle can be applied to the larger controversies of peoples. Within the bosom of the Parliament these controversies must be adjudicated. The supreme interest of all is that right shall be done, because without right there is no peace. And right is tested by its compatibility with the opponent's right. I am under no illusions as to any sudden transformation of human nature. A new habit must be acquired of estimating what is just for oneself. But I believe that the great Parliament which takes the planetary view is the organ which will gradually educate the peoples in this new habit.

There is the narrowly national point of view, the terrestrial point of view, taking account of all the inhabitants of the earth, and there is beyond this the cosmic or spiritual point of view. This, religion will have to instil. The new conditions brought about by the present conflict are favorable to the formation of a new religious ideal. And this ideal itself will assist in forming the new conditions. Greater even than freedom and justice is love—in a sense vaster than that which is usually attributed to the word, love between group and group, between people and people, is the sublimest expression of spiritual relations.

I mean a kind of spiritual self-love—for bare altruism will never be the tie that is needed. Individuals and peoples are bound to love themselves. And if they are to love others passionately, enduringly, with constancy, with devotion to the point of sacrifice, it must be because they love in these others that which is complementary, indispensable to themselves. So must a people learn to love that in others which they themselves cannot afford to miss. For we are so made by nature that each of us, individ-

uals and peoples, have many needs, many intense and noble longings which others, not we, have the faculty to satisfy. So do we depend on France for the things which France has added to the spirited possessions of the human race, the charm, the humanitarianism, the clarity of mind. Who can measure the inexpressible calamity it would have been, not for France alone but for mankind, if France had been crushed by the rude blow of the militarist arm! And so we need England; and we shall need Germany again when she has shaken off, as she bids fair now to do, the nightmare that has rested on her for fifty years, and that she has spread around her across Europe. We shall not want to miss the new utterances of the soul of a people which expressed itself in Beethoven's music, in Goethe's Faust and in a hundred other ways. The singular beauty of the art of China, also unique in its way, is a gift not only for China, but for the rest of the nations. And so there are the untutored, slumbering peoples of the earth, in whom the soul is just dawning, in whom there are latent capacities of enriching the life and culture of the world. These we need. The mutual need of these and such as these is the bond that must bind the nations. The fellowship of the nations must be founded on international truth, international justice, and in the large sense in which I have used the term, on international love.

If you are interested to know more about the Ethical Movement in America and the work of its local organizations, descriptive literature will be sent to you without cost on application to

THE AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION
2 West 64th Street, New York City

On Sale at the Above Address, or Mailed at Prices Quoted, the Following

BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS ON ETHICAL SUBJECTS

By Felix Adler. An Ethical Philosophy of Life, $3. The Religion of Duty, 50 cents. Moral Instruction of Children, $1.50. Life and Destiny, cloth, 25 cents. The World Crisis and Its Meaning, $1.50. Marriage and Divorce, 75 cents. The Spiritual Meaning of Marriage, 10 cents. The Vision of New York as the Democratic Metropolis of the Future, 10 cents. The Punishment of Children, 10 cents. The Protestant Reformation, 10 cents.

By William M. Salter. Moral Aspiration and Song (36 Hymns with Music), 25 cents.

By Walter L. Sheldon. Old Testament Bible Stories for the Young, $1.15. Citizenship and the Duties of a Citizen, $1.15. The Life of Jesus for the Young, new edition, $1.00. The Bible from the Standpoint of Modern Scholarship, $1.00. A Sentiment in Verse for Every Day in the Year, 75 cents. A Wisdom Gem for Every Morning and Evening in the Year, 75 cents.

By Alfred W. Martin. Great Religious Teachers of the East, $1.25. Foundations for Faith in a Future Life, $1.50. The Life of Jesus in the Light of the Higher Criticism, $1.50. The Dawn of Christianity, $1.25. What Human Life is For, 50 cents. Psychic Tendencies of To-day, $1.50. America's Duty and the Coming Internationalism, 25 cents.

By William James. Is Life Worth Living, 10 cents.

By Horace J. Bridges. Criticisms of Life, $1.50. The Religion of Experience, $1.50.

By F. J. Gould. Children's Book of Moral Lessons. Four Series, 75 cents each. Stories for Moral Instruction, 75 cents. Brave Citizens, 75 cents.

By Percival Chubb. The Religion of Young America During the War—and After, 10 cents.

This Address is Reprinted from THE STANDARD, to which Dr. Felix Adler is a Regular Contributor, and which appears Monthly from October to May. Fifteen Cents a Number. One Dollar a Year. Published by The American Ethical Union, 2 West 64th Street, New York City. Sample Copies Free on Application.